

Message Text

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PAGE 01 VALLET 00593 121353Z

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C O N F I D E N T I A L VALLETTA 0593

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, MT, UR

SUBJ: TASS CORRESPONDENT'S ACTIVITIES PROVOKE ADVERSE
COMMENTS IN MALTESE PRESS

1. RESIDENT "TASS CORRESPONDENT", VILYAM VAGANOVICH
MKTRCHYAN, WHO HAS BEEN IN MALTA SINCE MAY 1972 AND IS
FAIRLY ACTIVE ON THE LOCAL SCENE, HAS RECENTLY ATTRACTED
CONSIDERABLE UNFAVORABLE COMMENT IN THE CONSERVATIVE (AND
ANTI-MINTOFF) PRESS. THE MAIN THRUST OF THE CRITICISIM HAS
CENTERED ON THE ASSUMED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MKRTCHYAN
AND THE INCIPIENT "COMMUNIST PARTY OF MALTA".

2. THE IMMEDIATE CAUSE OF THE RECENT NEWSPAPER SNIPING
AT MKRTCHYAN WAS THE PUBLICATION OF AN ARTICLE HE WROTE
(OSTENSIBLY AN ABRIDGEMENT FROM THE SOVIET WEEKLY "NEW
TIMES" OF JANUARY 2, 1976) FOR THE PRO-MINTOFF, GENERAL
WORKERS UNION ENGLISH-LANGUAGE DAILY "MALTA NEWS." IN
THIS ARTICLE, MKRTCHYAN PRESENTED HIS OWN RATHER FANCIFUL
INTERPRETATION OF MALTESE HISTORY, WHILE EXTOLLING THE
VIRTUES OF THE PRESENT "PROGRESSIVE" ELEMENTS IN MALTESE
SOCIETY. AMONG THESE ELEMENTS, HE LISTED THE "COMMUNIST
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 VALLET 00593 121353Z

PARTY OF MALTA", THE "MALTESE-SOVIET CULTURAL SOCIETY",

AND THE "PROGRESSIVE YOUTH LEAGUE OF MALTA".

3. MKRTCHYAN EMPHASIZED THAT THE PRESENT LABOR GOVERNMENT IS LEADING MALTA AWAY FROM ITS "ANTI-DEMOCRATIC" PAST, WHEN MALTA WAS "DOMINATED BY THE BRITISH COLONIALISTS AND THE REACTIONARY CATHOLIC CLERGY". HOWEVER, HE STATED THAT MALTA'S TRUE REVOLUTIONARY FUTURE LAY IN THE DIRECTION OF CLOSER TIES WITH THE SOVIET UNION. TO ACCOMPLISH THIS, MKRTCHYAN ADVOCATED INCREASED EFFORTS BY MALTA'S GROWING "PROGRESSIVE" GROUPS.

4. MKRTCHYAN'S ARTICLE WAS VIEWED WITH ALARM BY THE CONSERVATIVE MALTESE PRESS, WHICH IS EXTREMELY WARY OF CLOSE INVOLVEMENT WITH THE SOVIET UNION, AND HIGHLY SUSPICIOUS OF ANY COMMUNIST ACTIVITIES IN MALTA. SEEING MALTA'S FUTURE AS EUROPEAN ORIENTED, THESE NEWSPAPERS (AND MANY INDIVIDUAL MALTESE) ARE QUITE DISTURBED AT THE PROMOTION IN MALTA OF EITHER PRO-SOVIET OR PRO-CHINESE IDEAS. THEY HAVE BEEN LESS THAN HAPPY WITH THE INTRODUCTION OF SEVERAL HUNDRED CHINESE "TECHNICIANS" HERE UNDER PRIME MINISTER MINTOFF'S LABOR GOVERNMENT, AND WOULD NOT WANT A SIMILAR MOVE IN THE DIRECTION OF THE RUSSIANS. THE OPPOSITION NATIONALIST PARTY, IN ADDITION, HAS STATED PUBLICLY THAT IT PREFERS SOME TYPE OF MALTESE TIE WITH NATO, AND THAT MINTOFF'S FLIRTATION WITH COMMUNIST GOVERNMENTS (OF WHATEVER TYPE) IS DANGEROUS FOR MALTA'S INDEPENDENCE.

5. MEANWHILE MALTA'S SMALL COMMUNIST PARTY AND THE "MALTESE-SOVIET CULTURAL SOCIETY" CONTINUE TO SEEK MAXIMUM PUBLICITY FOR THEIR PRO-SOVIET ACTIVITIES. THEY HAVE SPONSORED SCHOLARSHIPS FOR MALTESE STUDENTS IN THE SOVIET UNION, SENT MALTESE GENERAL WORKERS UNION REPRESENTATIVES TO THE 1976 MAY DAY FESTIVITIES IN MOSCOW, AND PAUL AGIUS, (THE SELF-STYLED "INTERNATIONAL SECRETARY" OF THE MALTESE COMMUNIST PARTY), ATTENDED THE 25TH CONGRESS OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF THE SOVIET UNION. ALTHOUGH SILENT ON THE SUBJECT, IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT MINTOFF'S RESIDENT FRIENDS, THE CHINESE, HAVE BEEN OVERLY PLEASED BY THESE ACTIVITIES.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 VALLET 00593 121353Z

6. COMMENT: AS WITH EVERYTHING ELSE IN MALTA, THE PRO-SOVIET EFFORTS OF MKRTCHYAN AND HIS FRIENDS BROOK LARGER ON THE LOCAL SCENE THAN WOULD NORMALLY BE THE CASE. HOWEVER, EVEN THOUGH THE NATIONALIST OPPOSITION IS CONCERNED ABOUT "FAR LEFT" ELEMENTS WITHIN THE LABOR PARTY, IT IS NOT EXPECTED THAT THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF MALTA (AS SUCH), WILL HAVE ANY SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON THE FORTHCOMING MALTESE ELECTIONS. IN THE MEANWHILE, PRIME

MINISTER MINTOFF CONTINUES TO KEEP HIS DISTANCE FROM THE SOVIETS. MINTOFF REFUSES TO PERMIT THE OPENING OF A SOVIET EMBASSY IN MALTA (THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR TO LONDON IS ALSO ACCREDITED TO MALTA), AND HE REPEATEDLY CALLED FOR THE REMOVAL OF THE FLEETS OF BOTH "SUPERPOWERS (I.E., THE US AND THE USSR) FROM THE MEDITERRANEAN. MKRTCHYAN, DOUBTLESS, WILL REMAIN A CONTROVERSIAL FIGURE AS THE "RESIDENT RUSSIAN" IN MALTA UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES. SMITH

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